

Capital Gazette

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Trisha Klein places pins on her world map each time one of her custom-made aprons sells internationally.

The Arnold resident, who runs [Mama's Apron Strings](#) from her basement, has sold to customers in Thailand, Brazil, Scotland, France and Italy, among other countries. And as the national focus shifts to increasing manufacturing in the United States, she has seen a growing demand for her 'Made in Annapolis' label.

"It's picking up; people are trying to buy American," said Klein, who has been selling her \$42 aprons since 2006. "People are always looking for products to send to their loved ones that say they're made in America. A lot of our friends come from Japan (for souvenirs) and they'll turn (the label) over and it'll say made in Japan."

The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Manufacturing Institute will launch the inaugural [Manufacturing Day](#) on Oct. 5, as a way to promote the jobs available in the field. Across the country, participating manufacturing companies will host open houses and tours. The NAM estimates that there are about 600,000 manufacturing jobs unfilled in the United States, largely because of a gap in job requirements and skills within the workforce.

In Maryland, nearly 115,000 workers were employed in the manufacturing industry in 2010, making up roughly 5 percent of the non-farm workforce. Total output in the field had been on the rise in the field, going from \$13 billion in 1997 and exceeded \$17 billion in 2009, the latest statistics available from NAM.

U.S. Rep. C.A. “Dutch” Ruppersberger, D-Baltimore County, has been trying to draw attention to the industry. Last year, he held an event at Anne Arundel Community College where he encouraged manufacturers to export their goods. House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, D-St. Mary’s, is also pushing legislation that would provide tax incentives to manufacturing businesses.

“One of the reasons middle-class families are finding it difficult to make it in America is because of the decrease in manufacturing jobs,” Ruppersberger said. “We’re still doing well, but we’re not where we should be.”

Time to retool?

On the Eastern Shore, a production staff of about 200 are involved in the assembly of what becomes Paul Reed Smith Guitars. Lumber is sent to the PRS’ Stevensville site, and after a process that includes sanding, staining, testing and finishing, roughly 1,000 guitars are assembled a month.

PRS President Jack Higginbotham said he understood the efforts to push for products made in the country, but it is an issue that is larger than a series of conversations.

“It’s up to the manufacturers to present goods that are worth the money that the public agrees upon to buy, that makes the wheels on the bus go round and round,” Higginbotham said, comparing it to the 1970s struggle with foreign car imports. “(U.S. automobile plants) had to get with the program. They had to re-engineer, re-establish their paradigms, retool everything and be competitive again. It’s all the same.”

Group assembly

Annapolis resident Kirsten Chapman assembles her line of products with the help of a welder in Baltimore and workers from the Providence Center. She admits her process is not streamlined,

but it is one she is willing to adhere to if it means keeping her line of [Kleynimals](#) — stainless steel toy rings —made in the USA.

“If I’m not making as much money at this point, it’s OK. I feel proud of the manufacturing process and the fact that I can say it’s made in America,” said Chapman, who has been in business for two years. Earlier this year, she appeared on the “Martha Stewart Show” and talked about keeping her brand in the country. “I can’t tell you how many people commented — people who I knew and didn’t know — who then became customers and said ‘I’m so glad this product is made in America.’”